

ECONOMIC EXPANSION

Similarly, I would not want future generations to conclude that the increased mineral revenues encouraged us to abandon our modest efforts to expand and diversify our economy, to diversify that economy through investments in education, our communities, our infrastructure and those programs designed to promote and expand economic opportunity.

I come to this issue with a bit of passion because I recall, as a young man in the mid-1970s, working in this city and in this government, and I watched the state largely abandon its efforts to encourage diversification and economic opportunity. The focus at that time became primarily on responding to a mineral development boom. And I am pleased to have recommended in this budget some efforts to respond to the expanded oil and gas development and its impacts, but I am equally committed to investing in our people and in our development of economic opportunity statewide. We cannot, during this boom, turn a deaf ear to the development of our economy as we turned in the 70s and the early 80s.

We are in the enviable position to make strategic investments in our future and our children's future without increasing taxes. We lament our children's departure from Wyoming because they lack jobs, and they lack the jobs that would be generated by a growing economy. In some ways the state is just like a business and anything else that is trying to grow, and like those things, we will not grow if we do not invest in ourselves and in our people. If low taxes were the only item necessary for economic diversification, Wyoming never would have endured the bust of the 1980s or missed the great national economic expansion of the 1990s.

We cannot simply sit back and say that the economy will take care of itself because state government has a spike in revenues. If we care about the children that we speak of so dearly when we say that they're leaving the state, we can exhibit that concern through investing today in the state – in our economy, in our education system and in our communities. I, for one, am not convinced that the turnaround will come fast enough to keep my kids in the state. But maybe, maybe if we invest in the state, I can get them to come back. Our family is no different than that of anybody else in the state. We watch our children leave; we hope that they'll come back. We have a chance to try and make that a reality, and it is my hope that some day my children will live in this state, that Nancy and I will have a chance to see grandchildren without having to travel 1,000 miles and that we can look back on this session and say that, at the beginning of a boom in energy prices, this state made a fundamental commitment to its future, to its investments and to our children and, frankly, particularly to getting my children home.